

## CALENDAR

### MASSACHUSETTS PESTICIDE EXAM SCHEDULE

UMASS Eastern Extension Center—240 Beaver St., Waltham

**MARCH 29.** Deadline for submitting application is **MARCH 22.**

**APRIL 5.** Deadline for submitting application is **MARCH 29.**

CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE—Rte. 132, 2240 Iyanough Rd., West Barnstable

**MARCH 20.** Deadline for submitting application is **MARCH 13.**

**QUESTIONS CALL—617-626-1785.**

**APRIL 10---FRUIT TREE PRUNING---**Shieling Forest, Peterborough, NH **CALL—603-431-6774**

**APRIL 12---ORCHARD MANAGEMENT MEETING---**Portsmouth, NH—**CALL—603-863-3203**

**APRIL 13 and 15---PRUNING DEMONSTRATION---**Dover, NH **CALL—603-749-4445**

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## ORGANIC OUTLOOK DIVIDED

By Laura Elia

Organic growing became one of the fastest growing sectors in agriculture during the 90s and continues to grow rapidly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, when you look at the available data—there were approximately 49,000 acres of certified organic fruit and nuts in 1997, while in that same year there were more than 5 million acres of conventionally grown fruit and nuts—you realize that organics are just a drop of water compared to the vast sea of conventional growing.

“Growers are increasingly adopting organic farming systems,” says Catherine Greene, an agricultural economist with USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS). “But the problem is that it’s starting from such a small base—it’s hard to really make a dent, in addition to the unfamiliarity with organic farming systems.”

So while growing organic seems to be growing, so to speak, there are many factors that justify why most don’t take the road to organics.

Going into organic growing is a very challenging prospect. It’s not just the physical transitioning from conventional to organic that’s tough, but also the change that comes along with it.

One concern about such changes is how to make a profit during the transitional period. Katherine DiMatteo, executive director of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), points out that transitional fruit can be sold under an eco-label until it is fully certified. Also, “if a farm is converting to organic, my advice would be to convert field by field—not do a total conversion,” she adds. “That way, while the farm is transitioning the conventional crop yield can support the transition costs and the transitional crops can be sold with the conventional crops.”

Another challenge that scares off many growers is the cost of growing organic fruit, although that’s not where the cost or risks really lie. “Cost per acre for growing organic apples is really no higher than conventional,” says Jim Bittner, managing partner of Singer Farms in Appleton, NY. “The problem is that the yields are lower and the risks of crop failure are much greater. Also, with no chemical thinners, growing small apples and biennial bearing are real problems.”

Many other obstacles that organic growers face are determined by where they live. “In the eastern part of the U.S., there are fewer conventional growers that seriously look into organic growing because they think it is not possible to grow produce in their area without using synthetic chemicals,” says Bittner. “The West just doesn’t have the insect and disease pressure that the East has.”

“If you ask people what they eat, they will usually bend their response towards what they know they should eat, not what they actually eat,” says Tim Smith, a Washington State University Cooperative Extension Agent. “They (consumers) will usually express concern about pesticides, if asked, and will state a preference for organic food,” he says. “They will deny their obsession for Snickers candy bars, and insist they feed their children lots of yogurt. When you extrapolate what people say they eat, you find that we sell a far different amount of those products, including organic.”

However, even though there are barriers to increasing consumer demand, some people are actually willing to pay a premium price for organic fruit. “A lot of growers do not see the marketing opportunity for sales of organic,” says Bittner. “Organic produce usually has different marketing channels than the conventional grower is used to.”

But as far as finding data for such organic marketing channels—forget it for now. “There is not yet the support system for organic that exists for conventional—seed companies, pesticide companies, Extension agents, university and government research, banks, loans, or statistical data,” says DeMatteo.

Although there isn't an abundance of information for organic growers to rely upon, there are initiatives that do offer a degree of help. For example, researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) are conducting a study called *Ecology Research And Education In Production Of Michigan Organic Apples*. "We've been able to develop a series of recommendations about planting, nutrition, mouse control, ground cover, and mulches," according to Mark Whalon, an entomologist with MSU and a researcher on the study. "Clearly, organic growers need to know more about the pest's biology, ecology and control than a conventional grower."

Additionally, "several universities are developing training programs for Extension agents to teach them how to provide outreach and Extension on organic farming systems," says Greene. "So there is slow movement towards being able to have adequate resources available to farmers to move into organic."

Then again, one of the key reasons for the distressing state of the conventional apple industry is oversupply. "Abundance is the enemy of agriculture," says Smith. "If supply outstrips demand, the price tumbles." If that's the case, then history may repeat itself if many fruit growers take the road to organics.

(Article from *AMERICAN FRUIT GROWER*, November 2001)

#### APPLE SHIPMENT TRACKING

Source: USDA

Amounts are shown in units of 10,000 pounds

Season Begins	03/03/02-03/09/02	02/24/02-03/02/02	03/04/01-03/10/01	Total this season 03/09/02	Total last season 03/10/01
SEPTEMBER	12,255	10,672	12,700	251,371	291,795

#### MID-WEEK F.O.B. PRICES AT MASSACHUSETTS COUNTRY SHIPPING POINT

Prices and grades received by telephone, MARCH 26, 2002

CORTLAND PRICES NO LONGER QUOTED

Controlled Atmosphere

VARIETY	GRADE	SIZE	PRICE
McINTOSH	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. Extra Fancy	80s	19.00
		96s	18.50
	Cartons Film Bags U.S. Fancy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	12.50
	Cartons Tote Bags U.S. Fancy	8-5s 2-1/2" min	14.00
EMPIRE	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. Extra Fancy	80s	18.00
		96s	17.50
	Cartons Film Bags U.S. Fancy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	11.50
	Cartons Tote Bags U.S. Fancy	8-5s 2-1/2" min	13.00
RED DELICIOUS	Cartons Tray Pack U.S. Extra Fancy	80s & 88s	13.50
	Cartons Film Bags U.S. Fancy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	11.00
	Cartons Tote Bags U.S. Fancy	8-5s 2-1/2" min	13.00

#### FEDERAL MARKET NEWS SERVICE, EVERETT, MASS.

MARCH 25, 2002

Controlled Atmosphere

NEW ENGLAND			
McINTOSH	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. Extra Fancy	100s	20.00
		120s	15.00
	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. Fancy	80s	16.00-18.00
		96s	15.00-16.00
	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. No. 1	80s	12.00

		100s, 120s, 140s	<b>9.00- 9.50</b>
	Cartons Film Bags U.S. No. 1	12-3s 2-1/2" min	<b>12.00</b>
		12-3s 2-1/4" min	<b>9.00-10.00</b>
<b>CORTLAND</b>	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. Extra Fancy	72s	<b>20.00</b>
		80s	<b>18.00</b>
		96s	<b>17.00</b>
	Cartons Cell Pack U.S. No. 1	72s	<b>15.00</b>
		80s	<b>12.00-15.00 mostly 15.00</b>
	Cartons Film Bags U.S. Fancy	12-3s 2-1/4" min	<b>15.00-16.00</b>
<b>SHIPPED IN</b>			
<b>McINTOSH</b>	NY Hudson Valley Ctns CelPk U.S. ExFcy	80s & 100s	<b>19.00-20.00</b>
	Lake Champlain Ctns CelPk U.S. ExFcy	80s	<b>22.50-23.50</b>
		100s	<b>20.00-22.00</b>
	NY Hudson Valley Ctns CelPk U.S. No. 1	80s	<b>11.00</b>
		100s	<b>10.00</b>
		120s	<b>9.50</b>
	Lake Champlain Ctns FlmBg U.S. ExFcy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	<b>12.00</b>
	NY Hudson Valley Ctns FlmBg U.S. ExFcy	12-3s 2-1/4" min	<b>10.00</b>

EMPIRE	PA Cartons Cell Pack U.S. ExFcy	88s	17.00
HONEY CRISP	NY Hudson Valley Ctns CelPk U.S. ExFcy	48s, 56s, 64s	18.00
	NY Hudson Valley Ctns FlmBgs U.S. ExFcy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	7.50
RED DELICIOUS	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	64s	16.00-18.00 mostly 17.00-18.00 fine appear. 19.00-21.00
		72s & 80s	16.00-17.00 fine appear. 19.00-21.00 mostly 20.00-21.00
		88s	16.00-17.50 fine appear. 19.00-21.00 mostly 20.00-21.00
		100s	16.00-17.00 fine appear. 18.00-20.00
		125s	16.00-18.00
GOLDEN DELICIOUS	PA Cartons Tray Pack U.S. ExFcy	100s	17.00
	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	64s	26.00-27.00
		72s	24.00-27.00 mostly 26.00
		80s	23.00-24.00 mostly 24.00
		88s	22.00-24.00 mostly 24.00
		100s	22.00-24.00 mostly 22.00
		113s	19.00-20.00
		125s	18.00-19.00 mostly 18.00
	WA Cartons Cell Pack WAExFcy	80s	27.00-28.00
		96s	26.00
120s		18.00	
ROYAL GALA	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	88s	25.00-28.00 mostly 26.00-27.00
		100s	24.00
RED ROME	PA Cartons Cell Pack U.S. ExFcy	80s	16.00
FUJI	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	56s	23.00-24.00
		64s	23.00
		80s & 88s	24.00-26.00 mostly 24.00
		100s	21.00-22.00
JONAGOLD	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	80s	22.00
CAMEO	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	80s	22.00
	NY Western Section Ctns CelPk U.S. Extra Fancy	80s	17.00-19.00
PINK LADY	WA Cartons Tray pack WAExFcy	80s	30.00
		100s	31.50
	CA Ctns Tray Pack U.S. ExFcy	64s & 72s	27.00
		88s	24.00
GRANNY SMITH	WA Cartons Tray Pack WAExFcy	64s	27.00-29.00
		72s	25.50-29.00 mostly 27.00-29.00
		80s	26.00-28.00
		88s	24.00-26.00
		100s	19.00-22.00 mostly 20.00
		113s	18.00-19.00
		125s	17.00-19.00 mostly 17.00-18.00
	WA Cartons Film Bags WAExFcy	12-3s 2-1/2" min	16.00-18.00 mostly 18.00
CIDER New England Preserved Cartons		4-1 gallon bottles	9.00- 9.40 mostly 9.00
		9 ½-gallon bottles	10.00 best 11.25
Howard Vinton, Editor			

